

DIME NOVEL ROUND-UP

A monthly magazine devoted to the collecting, preservation and literature of the old-time dime and nickel novels, libraries and popular story papers.

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Tales of Klondike Gold in Dime Novels

By J. Edward Leithead



Front cover of a Klondike Kit Library from the Charles Duprez collection of dime novel pictures

In July, 1897, when word of the great gold strikes in the Klondike finally went round the world, a long list of unfamiliar names were in the news and studded the conversation of people who were either mildly or wildly excited by this latest of many gold rushes; names like Dawson, Circle City, Chilkoot Pass and White Pass, words such as sourdough (old-timer), cheechako (tenderfoot), mal-emutes (the huskies that made up the tandem dog teams), dog-puncher (a driver of dog teams), mush (hit the trail). Actually, the big pay-streaks underlying the moose pastures had been tapped a year earlier by Bob Henderson and George Carmack, although Henderson profited little by it. It may seem strange that news of the discovery didn't reach the "outside" sooner, but the Yukon is a fast and hard-freezing river, no steamboat could navigate it once the winter of 1896 set in.

Bonanza and Eldorado Creeks came alive and Dawson City was the big gold town. There had been prospectors in the region for years, but gold in such quantities had never been found before. Fortymile was one of the earlier gold camps, so was Circle City. The Royal Northwest Mounted Police established a post at Fort Yukon, and if there was then not so much doing that required the attention of these famous redcoat riders of the law, they had their hands full when the stampede of 1897-98 got under way. Gold-seekers from everywhere came upriver in every kind of boat, bringing not only mining tools and food but dogs, horses, mules. They landed at Dyea and went up over the Chilkoot Pass, or at Skagway and hit the trail over the White Pass. Take your choice, both passes

were frightening to climb and took tragic toll of the animals used to pack mining outfits and grub.

Since this was placer mining, the way the Klondikers dug the gold was to sink a shaft to bedrock (which was the pay gravel), haul it to the top for gathering in a huge dump until summer. The first operation took place in winter and fires were built to soften up frozen earth before the shaft could go through. As all creek water was frozen, too, until around late spring, the sluice-boxes into which the gravel from the dumps was shoveled, to wash out the gold against the riffles, couldn't be worked until water was flowing freely. And during the summer water went to low levels even in the Yukon River, so that the people of Dawson were once threatened with starvation when supply boats got hung up on sandbars.

As always, in gold rushes, the number who profited greatly was exceedingly small in comparison to the horde of hopefuls who made the long fight to reach the Klondike, and probably the richest of these was "Big Alec" McDonald. Yet this "King of the Klondike" went through a fortune of twenty million and ended his days poor. "Swiftwater Bill" Gates was a man who could spot a good prospect better than most; he made his pile in the Klondike, spent it, made it again in the later Fairbanks gold rush.

A few of the celebrities, either local or visiting, in Dawson, at the height of the stampede were "Tex" Reikard, "Klondike Kate" Rockwell, "Lucky" Baldwin and Joaquin Miller, the poet of the Sierras, both of California, two famous ones from Deadwood Gulch, South Dakota, Calamity Jane and Captain Jack Crawford, the poet-

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scout of the Black Hills, and gun-toting Wyatt Earp, of Dodge City, Kansas, and Tombstone, Arizona. Earp afterward operated a hotel in Nome, Alaska, when gold-seekers went there in 1899.

Located in Yukon Territory and ruled by the redcoat Mounted Police, Dawson City was orderly, but in Skagway, Alaska, Wyatt Earp might have put his talent for gunslinging to good use, for it was there that a badman and gambler from the States, Soapy Smith, ran the town with a gang that finally overstepped itself. The fedup citizens got together a vigilance committee, and Frank Reid, the vigilante chief (a civil engineer who was a founding father of the town), shot it out with Soapy on the Skagway docks. They killed each other, but that swift exchange of hot lead between the leaders of those for and against law and order, wrote the finish of the Soapy Smith gang.

Just as former gold and silver strikes had produced a literature of their own—the California goldfields, the Alder Gulch diggings, Virginia City and the Comstock Lode, the Black Hills stampede—so did the discovery of gold in the Klondike result in a new type of adventure story. A young man named Jack London, getting his local color at firsthand, began writing of this new and fabulous region, and those tales of his are still among the best of their kind: "The Son of the Wolf," a series of short stories, the novels "Burning Daylight," "White Fang," "The Call of the Wild" and "Smoke Bellew." Another budding author was Rex Beach, who was to write "The Spoilers," "The Barrier" and other novels of the Klondike gold rush. Long after it had passed its peak, a young bank clerk named Robert W. Service wrote books of verse, "Songs of a Sourdough" and "Ballads of a Cheechako" which brilliantly re-create the "spell of the Yukon." Also, he wrote a novel about it, "The Trail of Ninety-eight."

Dime novel publishers were quick to respond to the new and exciting gold fever by issuing, for arm-chair

adventurers particularly, stories of the region where all this was taking place.

Frank Tousey started publication of a series of Klondike tales ahead of Street and Smith, the first issue of YOUNG KLONDIKE being dated March 16, 1898, and entitled, "Young Klondike, or, Off for the Land of Gold," by an Old Miner, the latter none other than that sterling writer and creator of "Old King Brady," Francis Worcester Doughty. He wrote all 39 numbers, so you know that they were topnotch. First published as a monthly, this excellent series of Klondike stories later was issued semi-monthly, then weekly.

"Young Klondike" was Nat Golden, his partner was Dick Luckey. Two others, who were to play leading parts, joined them before they attempted the journey over Chilkoot Pass. One was a girl, Edith Welton, the other a detective, called the Unknown, who wore a plug hat in the coldest weather, when others were wearing fur caps.

The full title of this novel was "Young Klondike: Stories of a Gold-Seeker," the masthead being as attractive, with its change in color scheme from issue to issue, as the changing masthead of "Pluck and Luck." A blurb on the back cover of early issues stated:

"Every story is full of facts and contains valuable information about this great gold-bearing country."

True. Author Doughty must have done considerable research before he wrote of the Yukon-Alaskan scene in these stories. Just why they have not attracted more attention among dime novel collectors is a little hard to understand. One reason may be, of course, that copies are so scarce. Just about every kind of Klondike adventure is dealt with in the comparatively short series and the color illustrations are fine, some of them outstanding.

Take No. 7, Young Klondike's Golden Island, or, Half a Million in Dust. The four partners are on a raft in the Yukon, defending themselves against a bunch of red-shirted miners,

armed with revolvers, who are swimming all around them, some having reached the raft and holding onto the outer planks.

No. 20, Young Klondike's Winter Camp, or, Mining Under the Snow, is another good one: a snow-clad cliff with snow-laden pine trees in the background, Young Klondike and the Unknown, arms bound, standing at the cliff's edge, with three miners behind them, armed with rifles. "Jump!" snarled Bill Boggs. "Jump, or we'll blow holes through your heads!"

No. 21, Young Klondike's Death Creek Deal, or, Downing the Gold King of Dawson, shows the interior of the Dawson Mining Exchange, crowded with wrathful miners, a couple of Indians. Dick Luckey and the Unknown are hustling the Gold King, who shakes his fist at Young Klondike. "He broke the rules!" said Young Klondike. "He is no longer a member of the Dawson Mining Exchange."

No. 27, Young Klondike's Indian Raid, or, The Six Days' Fight on Copper River: Scene along the banks of Copper River, the Unknown in midstream struggling with an Indian; Young Klondike, Dick and Edith on the near bank, the first named trying to target the redskin with a rifle; many Indians on the far bank, brandishing lances.

No. 32, Young Klondike and the Dead Horse Claim, or, Working a Mountain of Gold: Scene is a canyon, no sign or snow nor are any of the five figures in the foreground clad for blizzard weather. Young Klondike, Dick, Edith and the Unknown standing with arms raised, as they are confronted by a red-shirted man with eye-holed black hood, a rifle in his left hand while he points with the right to some skeletons, with shredded clothing on them, lying at his feet. His words, as well as the overall scene, remind one of the Bradys and Alice Montgomery in a Western setting in SECRET SERVICE: "You are trapped at last, Young Klondike," said the mask in solemn tones. "One step forward and your bones will lie there with those before you. My

chance has come!"

KLONDIKE KIT LIBRARY, published by Street & Smith, was first issued weekly. No. 1, dated May 28, 1898, was titled, "Klondike Kit, or, A Freeze-out in the Chilkoot Pass," by Hugh P. Rodman. "Rodman" was William Wallace Cook, who authored all 19 issues. These were all in the small novel format, 7x10, while Young Klondike were all 8x11.

Girl interest was Nell Andrews, "sometimes called Nugget Nell, in Cripple Creek (Colorado), where I came from a few days ago." "Klondike Kit" Cummings met her in the first number, she was also on the cover with him, both fur-clad for Yukon adventure, a scene showing a dog team amidst frozen wasteland and Kit, protective arm about Nell, holding a gun on the whip-slashing villain of this particular tale. The picture was drawn by Edward Johnson.

Nugget Nell was in the title of No. 2, Klondike Kit and His Girl Pard, or, Nugget Nell's Fight for a Fortune, and again she was on the cover with Kit. In fact, she's on all the covers of the five issues I've examined, so I conclude she never missed an appearance on all 19 numbers.

Sub-titled "A Library of Adventure in the Alaskan Mines," a blurb on a back cover thus describes the series:

"This, the latest library of the Klondike gold fields, will contain each week a thrilling story of adventure in that wonderful land toward which every eye is now turned. Never since the discovery of gold in California in 1849, has so much absorbing interest been taken in gold finds. The northern region of Alaska is now the Mecca of every gold-seeker's hope, and in no part of the whole world can there be found such a rich field for our talented author, Mr. Hugh P. Rodman, to work in. We can say, without a doubt, that no writer today is better able to depict the Alaskan scenes than Mr. Rodman, who has spent several years of his life in that country.

"The Klondike Kit Library will tell you all about it, make you familiar with the country, the way to reach

it, and at the same time entertain you with the very best stories of adventure ever written."

But the series didn't last long, in spite of the lure of gold as a subject. It was issued weekly up to No. 13, changed to a monthly with No. 14 or 15 (I had only five scattered numbers to work with, so can't be sure). The stories were good, for Cook was a skilled writer of adventure tales. The covers—well, in my opinion they are less attractive than those on **YOUNG KLONDIKE**. If Edward Johnson had done all of them (which he did not, and I don't know the name of the other artist), I believe the artistic result would have been much better. Some of the stories from Klondike Kit Library (changed to Klondike Kit Weekly, and back again to "Library" in the issues when it became a monthly) were reprinted in the late issues of *Do and Dare* with slightly changed titles.

DIAMOND DICK, JR. WEEKLY (color covers, early format 7x10) had completed a year's run of numbers when the gold fever struck, and No. 53 was "Off for Alaska, or, Diamond Dick, Jr.'s Trail to Circle City." No. 54 was *The Rush for the New Eldorado*, or, Diamond Dick, Jr. on to Dawson, No. 55, *In the Klondike Mines*, or, A Ton and a Half of Gold in Diamond Dick, Jr.'s Care, No. 56, *Diamond Dick, Jr.'s Klondike Claim*, or, *Striking It Rich in the Frozen North*, and No. 57, *Diamond Dick, Jr. Homeward Bound*, or, *Breasting the Perils of Chilkoot Pass*. The author of these probably was William Wallace Cook, who wrote a lot of early Diamond Dicks under the pseudonym "W. B. Lawson." More than any other weekly, Diamond Dick, Jr. returned, during its long life of 762 issues, to the Klondike for a series of adventures. Mining, railroading and ranching were three things the Diamond Dicks, father and son, went for, anyway. After that first series of five in the early issues, young Diamond Dick and Handsome Harry returned to the Klondike goldfields in No. 466, *Diamond Dick in the Klondike*, or, *The Crazy Croesus of the Yukon*, 467, *Dia-*

mond Dick's Call to Time, or, *The Mystery of Chilkoot Pass* and 468, *Diamond Dick's Golden Trail*, or, *The Bad Man from Forty Mile*. These stories were by George C. Jenks, who took Dick, Harry, Billy Doo and Belle Bellair north again in No. 544, *Diamond Dick in the Deep Snows*, or, *A Close Call on the Yukon* and 545, *Diamond Dick's Merciless Trail*, or, *The Two Rascals of White Horse*. In No. 544, Diamond Dick appeared on the cover more suitably garbed for Arctic winter than usual, a heavy mackinaw and fur cap; usually he wore a bearskin coat as protection against zero weather, and for the rest, his white Stetson and fringed buckskin chaps.

His next series of Alaskan adventures began with No. 654, *Diamond Dick's Strangest Trail*, or, *The Big Man from Sitka*; 655, *Diamond Dick's Snow Rampart*, or, *A Fight for a Bride Below Zero*, and 656, *Diamond Dick in the Frozen Hills*, or, *Putting the Clamps on a Bad Gang*. Authored by George C. Jenks or John H. Whitson, I'm not certain which but inclined to think the latter.

I am certain, however, that W. Bert Foster wrote this last and longest series of northern cold and gold stories for the weekly—I might preface the list by saying that Nome, Alaska, was originally called Anvil Creek and had a big gold strike in 1899: No. 739, *Diamond Dick's Trail to Nome*, or, *The Old Sourdough's Claim for a Million*, 740, *Diamond Dick's Wireless Trick*, or, *The Flight of the White Bird*, 741, *Diamond Dick in a Perilous Path*, or, *The Testing of Ne-O-Che, the Hunter*, 742, *Diamond Dick's Dog Team*, or, *The Trail to the Yukon*, 743, *Diamond Dick's Race Against Time*, or, *The Supply Train to Gold Cone*, 744, *Diamond Dick on the Yukon Flats*, or, *The Perilous Voyage of the Motor-scooter*, 745, *Diamond Dick in Dawson*, or, *The Loss of Sir Lionel's Emeralds* and 746, *Diamond Dick's Five Against Fifty*, or, *The Master of the Corn-dodger Claims*. In many of his Yukon adventures Dick aided the Royal Northwest Mounted Police.

NICK CARTER WEEKLY, starting in 1897 (with color covers and replacing the old black-and-white Nick Carter Library) was infected by the gold fever in its first issue—The Gold Mine Case, or, How Chick's Son Became a Detective. Young Trim Carter continued in the northland in No. 2, Trim's Race Across the Ice Field, or, Hunting a Criminal With a Team of Dogs, No. 3, Trim and the Swedish Swindler, or, Bilk You's Career in Alaskan Society (anyone who "bilked" you defrauded you, it was a word often used in those days), and No. 4, Trim Among the Esquimaux, or, A Long Night in the Frozen North. These four goldfield tales were reprinted as the first volume of Magnet Library, titled A Klondike Claim and dated September 1, 1897, all unchanged except that Trimble Carter had become one Harvey Stokes.

No more Klondike adventures in Nick Carter Weekly until No. 495, The Klondike Bank Puzzle, or, Nick Carter's Narrow Escape and 496, The "Bad Man" of Nome, or, Nick Carter's Hunt in Alaska. In No. 553, A Mystery from the Klondike, or, Nick Carter's Double-headed Case, Nick didn't go north to solve the case, in fact it wound up in the Southwest.

Ted Strong caught the gold fever briefly in No. 100 of ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY, King of the Wild West's Meteor, or, The Race for the Klondike Diamond. Good cover illustration, wintry landscape with Ted driving a dog team in the foreground. Someone with another dog team is shooting at him from the snowy background.

BRAVE AND BOLD published at least one such tale, No. 6, The Winged Demon, or, The Gold King of the Yukon, by William G. Patten, and there was one in MEDAL LIBRARY No. 92, Spectre Gold. A Romance of the Klondike, by Headon Hill.

Tousey's HAPPY DAYS started running serials as soon as the news of the gold strike broke: Nos. 151 to 158, The Klondike Boys, or, Two Yankees on the Yukon, which began Sep. 4, 1897 and was concluded Oct. 23, 1897. Nos. 159 to 166 contained, The Princess of the Klondike, or, A Brave

Girl's Fight for Gold and Fame, Oct. 30, 1897 to Dec. 18, 1897. Nos. 496 to 499 featured Young King Klondike, or, The Boy Who Brought Back a Million. This serial ran April 16, 1904 to May 7, 1904, and there were probably others like it between the last mentioned 1897 serial and this one in 1904; also others later in 1904 and onward, for when Happy Days reached No. 983, there was still an echo from the goldfields in the title, A Klondike Boy in Wall Street.

Naturally, Fred Fearnot made at least one trip there in WORK AND WIN #52, Fred Fearnot in the Klondike, or, Working the Dark Horse Claim. Possibly he had more than one Klondike adventure. At any rate, Francis Worcester Doughty had not written himself out on the subject in YOUNG KLONDIKE. In SECRET SERVICE he had Old and Young King Brady handle goldfield cases in No. 177, The Bradys in the Klondike, or, Ferreting Out the Gold Thieves, 184, The Bradys on Blizzard Island, or, Tracking the Gold Thieves of Cape Nome, 303, The Bradys and "Klondike Kate", or, The Hurry Call from Dawson, 334, The Bradys and Captain Klondike, or, The Man from the North Pole, and 352, The Bradys at Gold Lake, or, Solving a Klondike Mystery.

PLUCK AND LUCK had one in No. 767, The House of Skulls, or, The Boy Miners of Blizzard Bay—and very likely other issues.

Even OLD CAP COLLIER LIBRARY published one in No. 737, Placer Dan, the Yukon Detective, or, The Missing Nuggets of Gold, by Ed Strayer. This was dated January 22, 1898.

Nowadays we hear of finds of oil, of gas, of uranium. Such finds mean big money, of course, and hardships are fewer than in the old days. But something is lacking, the enchantment produced by the very sounds of gold and silver, the high drama of stampeding thousands, the picturesque of the old-timers who showed up at every "strike" with pick, shovel and goldpan, frequently with little mouse-gray burros as their only companions.

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